

Message Text

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TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3031

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1085

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD; JERUSALEM FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ASAD'S FRENCH TV INTERVIEW

REF: DAMASCUS 1077 (NOTAL)

1. FBIS MARCH 21 CARRIED TEXT OF ASAD'S INTERVIEW WITH FRENCH STATE TELEVISION WHICH WAS SCREENED IN FRANCE AND SYRIA EVENING MARCH 20. IN UNUSUAL DEPARTURE FROM ITS HABIT OF BREATHLESSLY PRESENTING PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENTS AS FRESH AND DEATHLESS PROSE, SYRIAN MEDIA HAS UNDERLINED THAT ORIGINAL INTERVIEW HAD BEEN TAPED MARCH 8, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING ASAD'S BAATH ANNIVERSARY DAY SPEECH IN WHICH ASAD REVIEWED SYRIAN AND AREA DEVELOPMENTS AND LAUNCHED PROPOSAL OF SYRO-PALESTINIAN JOINT COMMAND. WE ASSUME MEDIA'S STRESS WAS TO UNDERLINE THAT SOME OF PRESIDENT'S OBSERVATIONS, OBVIOUSLY THOSE CONCERNING THE JOINT COMMAND AND

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PERHAPS ALSO THOSE ABOUT THE SECRETARY'S DIPLOMACY PRIOR TO

HIS "RETURN TO DAMASCUS," WHICH OCCURRED MARCH 9, SHOULD BE READ IN TIME FRAME OF TWO WEEKS AGO.

2. WE FIND PARTICULARLY INTRIGUING ASAD'S ANSWER TO INTERVIEWER'S QUESTION AS TO WHAT HE UNDERSTANDS BY ESTABLISHMENT OF A "PALESTINIAN ENTITY." AFTER INITIALLY DODGING QUESTION BY SAYING THAT HE HAD NO RIGHT TO INTERVENE IN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF PALESTINE, PRESIDENT WENT ON TO SAY THAT WHEN UNITY IS ACHIEVED IN THE POLITICAL COMMAND, SYRIANS AND PALESTINIANS WILL DISCUSS WHAT THE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE ARE. "THEN, I PRESUME THAT ANY MEMBER OF THIS UNIFIED COMMAND CAN ANSWER WHAT THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS ARE." ASAD'S HABIT OF THINKING OUT LOUD IN THESE INTERVIEWS IS WHAT MAKES HIM ATTRACTIVE TO THOSE FEW JOURNALISTS WHO GAIN ACCESS TO HIM. WHILE PRESIDENT NORMALLY REFERS ALL QUESTIONS DEFINING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS TO THE PLO AS "SOLE REPRESENTATIVE" IN ACCORDANCE WITH RABAT SUMMIT DECISIONS, HE ON OCCASION SEEMINGLY FORGETS TO DO SO AND, AS HAPPENED RECENTLY WITH NEWSWEEK'S DE BORCHGRAVE, LETS HIMSELF SPECULATE ON SHAPE OF THE FUTURE STATE. THIS TYPE OF SLIP IS WHAT MAKES SOME PALESTINIANS FEAR A TAKEOVER OF THEIR CAUSE.

3. THE POWER IMBALANCE INHERENT IN THE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN RELATIONSHIP AND THE CONCERN OF SOME IN THE PLO ABOUT FORMALLY JOINING UP WITH "BIG BROTHER HAS REPORTEDLY CREATED UNEASINESS IN PLO CIRCLES TO ASAD'S OFFER TO A JOINT COMMAND. AS WITNESSED BY THE PACE OF DEVELOPMENTS SINCE MARCH 8 CULMINATING IN TODAY'S APPROVAL OF THE JOINT COMMAND BY THE PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL, SUCH UNEASINESS HAS NOT BEEN TRANSLATED INTO SERIOUS HESITATION OVER THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL. OUTRIGHT REJECTION OF ASAD'S OFFER BY THE PLO WAS INCONCEIVABLE FROM THE BEGINNING GIVEN PRESENT INTER-ARAB DIVISIONS.

MURPHY

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